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# MEMORY OF THE WORLD

the UNESCO Courier

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Timbuktu manuscripts.

## MEMORY OF THE WORLD

**Manuscripts, illuminations, archives, early films – the documentary heritage of humanity is fragile and threatened. For the last 15 years, UNESCO's Memory of the World programme participates in its preservation. More documents of exceptional value are being inscribed in the Memory of the World Register from 11 to 15 June in Pretoria (South Africa).**

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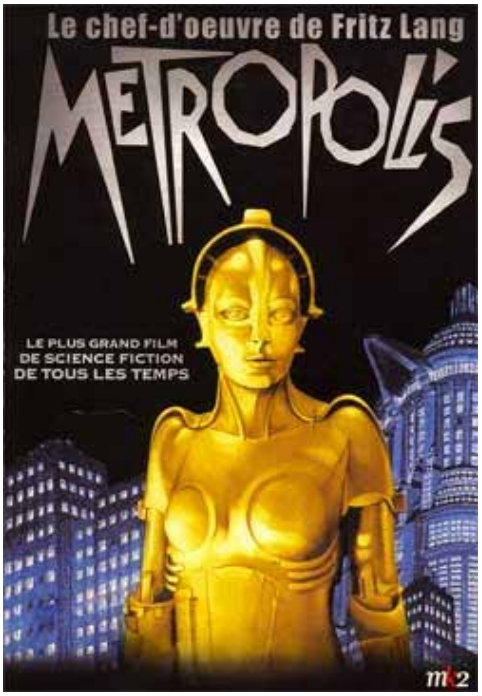
**For the last fifteen years, the programme Memory of the World has focused on conservation and digitization of humanity's documentary heritage. With UNESCO's support, measures have been taken to preserve dozens of archive collections, thousands of meters of film, millions of pages of manuscripts, books and periodicals.**

# DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE IN THE DIGITAL AGE:

## NTERVIEW WITH ABDELAZIZ ABID

*Former Secretary-General of the National Library of Tunisia, Abdelaziz Abid is now a programme specialist in the Memory of the World programme.*



Cover of a brochure published for the opening of "Metropolis."

***A few years ago, the public responded very enthusiastically to the re-release of "Metropolis", German film-maker Fritz Lang's masterpiece, in its restored and digitized version. In 2001, it was included in the Memory of the World Register.***

It was the first film to be inscribed in the Memory of the World Register. Besides its unquestionable qualities and the innovations it introduces in special effects, costumes and music, this monument of cinema holds particular interest from the point of view of conservation and restoration.

The Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau Foundation (Munich, Germany), which owns the rights to Fritz Lang's film legacy, went to considerable lengths to get hold of all known copies, extract the best elements and undertake a digital restoration. It thus gave new life to the film and made it possible for audiences in the 21st century to see a work of exceptional quality that was filmed in 1927.

***The Memory of the World programme came into being 15 years ago. What inspired it?***

From the beginning, the programme set itself a double goal, both to safeguard threatened documentary heritage and to bring documents that symbolize the history of humanity to the attention of a wider public. But the people backing the programme quickly came up against a contradiction: the most important documents are not in danger because they are already the object of extensive safeguarding measures; little-known archive collections are the ones in danger.

To reconcile these two concerns, the Register was established in 1997. Every two years, the documents most representative of humanity are inscribed in it. At the same time we launch projects to safeguard documents that are in particular need of attention.

Many of these projects involve digitization, since our main goal is to make these documents accessible to the general public. For instance, one of UNESCO's first projects was undertaken with the National Library of the Czech Republic, in Prague.

It began very modestly with US$20,000, which allowed us to digitize a few collections of historical manuscripts. But this partnership with UNESCO motivated other organizations to sponsor projects. The library now has an excellent workshop that digitizes not only collections but also documents requested by researchers – it costs about US$20 to digitize an entire manuscript. The library in fact became in 2005 the first laureate of the Jikji Memory of the World Prize.

***You said the programme's main goal was to make the documents accessible to the general public. What about conservation?***

Conservation is not an end in itself, it is a means, a necessary condition, to allow the world's citizens to have access to documentary heritage. The ultimate goal is access to the contents of these documents, which before the digital age were generally under lock and key. How many people had the opportunity to see Gutenberg's Bible before digiti-

© National Library á Prague
Czech National Library Prague historic manuscripts collection.

zation existed? Now everybody can see it. The programme therefore adopted digitization immediately. Not as a safeguarding measure, but as a means to ensure access.

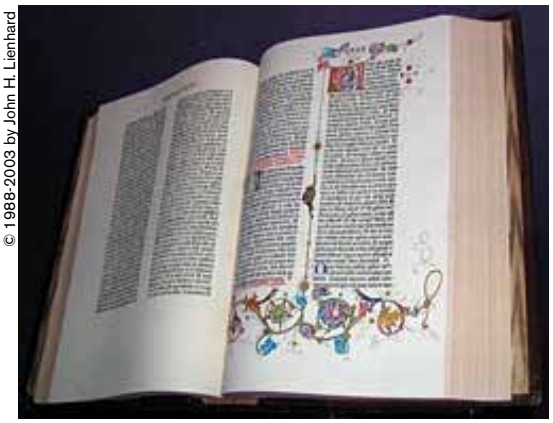
But there's one thing to remember – just because you digitize a document doesn't mean you've safeguarded it for ever. Its conservation is an ongoing concern. At the same time, you have to preserve the digital document. Without preservation, a digital document disappears in ten years.

***That means that digital documents are even more fragile than those on traditional materials?***

Of course. A piece of parchment can survive for several centuries. Newsprint lasts several decades. It isn't that the CD-ROM or the USB key can't last for decades too, but the way in which the information is coded soon becomes obsolete. The problem isn't the lifespan of the physical materials, but the progress in formats.

In Yemen, manuscripts were discovered in the main Sana'a mosque by chance that had remained walled up for 13 centuries! If you forget a digital document somewhere, at the end of ten years there's nothing left of it.

If we don't pay attention to preserving digital documents, we will leave a black hole for future generations. They'll find Sumerian clay tablets, Chinese, Arabic and European manuscripts and paper…and getting to the 20th and 21st centuries, nothing! We must preserve traces of what we have created.


© 1988-2003 by John H. Lienhard
Gutenberg Bible.

***What has to be done?***

We have to begin by adopting a real digital conservation strategy. We can't leave it to chance. Every country has to have an institution responsible for coordinating digital preservation efforts at a national level, to avoid either duplicating or overlooking things.

At the same time, documents must be moved periodically from one format to another. In most documentation centres and archives these days, what is basically a very simple technique is applied automatically.

***Is this expensive?***

Five dollars per gigabyte is the estimated annual preservation cost of digital information. A gigabyte contains a lot of information, however, and the price doesn't seem exorbitant. But when you take into account the quantity of digital information circulating in the world, which is to say some 12 billion gigabytes, it means 60 billion dollars a year. This is enormous.

A global organization can't take on this task. UNESCO's role is less in funding than in alerting public opinion, guiding and supporting countries to adopt policies to make it possible to safeguard their documentary heritage, in whatever form. But every country has its own work to do.

***In 2003, UNESCO's Member States adopted the Charter on the Preservation of the Digital Heritage. To what end?***

The Charter focuses attention on all the problems I have brought up. In a way, it pulled the emergency cord. It's an official document that sets out general principles, but is not legally binding.

At the same time, UNESCO also published, in collaboration with the Australian National Library, a large volume of guidelines for digital conservation. It deals with technical procedures and is available on line.

Interview by
**Jasmina Šopova**

**Detective work, technical progress and luck lie at the core of the restoration of The Story of the Kelly Gang, the world's first feature length film. With it, Australia recovers the earliest record of a myth dear to its heart and part of its collective memory.**

# RETURN OF THE KELLY GANG

© The National Film and Sound Archive of Australia

"The Story of the Kelly Gang" - 1906: Ned Kelly shooting Fitzpatrick in the horse yard.

With American film so dominant across the world, it may come as a surprise to some film enthusiasts to learn that the very first full length narrative feature film was in fact made by Australians.

Films depicting news events or domestic scenarios had been screened before awe-struck audiences from the late 1800's on, but they were usually no longer than ten minutes in duration, taking up just one film reel. That all changed when an Australian family of theatrical entrepreneurs took it upon themselves to create an hour long narrative film, using five reels in total, heralding the beginning of what was to become the feature length film experience.

The Story of the Kelly Gang, inscribed on UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 2007, opened in Melbourne's Athenaeum Hall on Boxing Day, December 26, 1906. It showed a fictionalised account of a real life bushranger, Ned Kelly, who had been caught and hanged just twenty five years earlier.

The exploits of Ned Kelly and his band of thieves captured the imagination of Australians in Kelly's lifetime and went on, after his death, to attain mythical status in the Australian psyche. Whatever violent acts they had committed, in a post colonial context the Kelly Gang were seen as anti-authoritarian heroes, standing up to corrupt cops and defending the honour of women. The iconic image of Kelly's last stand at The Glenrowan Hotel, wearing a homemade suit of armour to protect him against police bullets, continues to stir emotion in a nation built upon the courage, conviction, and as some contend, forced criminality of exiled Irish convicts.

## *The making and unmaking of a movie*

Film exhibitor Charles Tait tapped into a universal fascination with this story and went on to write, direct, and with his brothers John and Nevin, produce and distribute an hour-long version of it. They were aided by other family members on acting duty, along with fellow exhibitors Millard Johnson and William Gibson as co-producers, technical advisors and camera operators. The Story of the Kelly Gang entertained audiences across Australia for weeks, and a year later, played to packed houses in New Zealand, Britain and Ireland.

Screenings took place in most Australian cities simultaneously, suggesting that at least half a dozen prints had been made. So controversial was the subject matter that the film was immediately banned in the Victorian towns in which the Kelly gang operated. Years later a state wide ban was imposed, and by the 1930's all films with a bush-ranging theme were banned across Australia. The world's first feature length film led directly to the first ever case of censorship!

The Story of the Kelly Gang was not only unique for its running time; it also evidenced a very sophisticated use of cinematography. Scenes would often run for up to ten minutes, framing the action in a theatrical manner in mid- to long shot, and establishing the conventions that would lay the groundwork for what was to become cinema's most enduring genre – the western.

Despite its popularity, and due mainly to the limitations of highly perishable easily flammable film stock, The Story of the Kelly Gang all but disappeared by the mid forties. Other versions of the story had been made, some of which created confusion amongst historians as to the authenticity of the original. But by the mid seventies, fragments of the Tait brother's 1906 masterpiece began to turn up, sometimes in the most unlikely places.

## *On the importance of snippets*

A tiny strip was found in Adelaide, another in Melbourne, most likely remnants left by local exhibitors, some of whom would re-arrange scenes, insert their own inter-titles or even ad scenes from out-takes.

© The National Film and Sound Archive of Australia

The original programme brochure.

In 1982 someone hand delivered a long but severely damaged sequence to the offices of a film industry magazine after finding it at a garbage dump. But by far the biggest breakthrough came in 2006 when a whole reel in near perfect condition was located at the National Film and TV Archive in the United Kingdom.

These snippets, together with archived copies of the original programme brochure, helped Australia's National Film and Sound Archive reconstruct The Story of the Kelly Gang. Advances in digital restoration made by Haghefilm Laboratories in Amsterdam meant that recovered footage could be remastered, damage to individual frames caused by dust and dirt was cleaned up and missing frames were replicated where necessary, by borrowing from those that did exist. Even so, only 17 minutes remain of the original film, with some key scenes chemically burnt almost beyond recognition.

The value of the well maintained programme brochures, posters, still photographs and press reviews from 1906 cannot be overstated – these archives have been as important as the discovery of film fragments in determining continuity, identifying characters and establishing narrative order.

A great deal of detective work lies at the core of this attempt to recover a record of a story that looms large in the Australian collective memory. This film depicting a key historical event is of immeasurable value to Australia's cultural heritage. A century on, and the story of the Kelly Gang and its impact on Australian national identity is as vivid as ever.

**Jo Chichester,**
producer, Sunday Arts,
ABC TV (Australia)

© The National Film and Sound Archive of Australia

Original programme cover of the restored version of "The Story of the Kelly Gang".

# TIMBUKTU MANUSCRIPTS: AFRICA'S WRITTEN HISTORY UNVEILED

**Some two hundred thousand ancient manuscripts that were disintegrating slowly but surely in libraries, cellars and attics in Timbuktu (Mali), today are systematically inventoried, preserved and digitized. These priceless treasures, the oldest dating back to the 13th century, are contributing to the rehabilitation of Africa's written history.**

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A manuscript from Timbuktu (Mali).

The key to a sizeable portion of Sahelian Africa's written memory is buried in Timbuktu, city perched on the crest of the Niger River in Mali. There, in the 15th century, at the height of the gold and salt trade, merchants and scholars are thick as thieves and the 25,000 African students enrolled at the University of Sankore camp in front of the ulemas reputed to be exceptionally erudite. In this "city of 333 saints", the arrival of a number of Arab-Berber intellectuals, fleeing Muslim Andalusia invaded by Christians, determines, for one, instruction of the Arabic language and Islamic science. In 1512, Leo Africanus reports that higher profits can be made there from selling books than from any other merchandise – proving the value of the written word.

Today some of these manuscript documents have vital political significance, as for instance the Tarikh el Sudan that traces the succession of the chiefs of Timbuktu in the 15th century, or the Tarikh el Fetash, which does the same for medieval Sudan. The existence of this heritage clearly refutes the stereotype that characterizes Africa as a continent of exclusively oral tradition.

**More than 15,000 documents have been exhumed and catalogued in Timbuktu thanks to UNESCO. The project, funded by the government of Luxembourg, has notably given support to the Ahmed Baba Documentation and Research Centre for its efforts in restoration, conservation, commercialization and publication of the contents of the manuscripts.**

## *Long forsaken treasures*

But do the indigenous populations of Mali know that they possess, under their feet or in their attics, hundreds of thousands of vital manuscripts dating from the 13th to the 19th century? Nothing is less certain. Because of a sanctified notion of African oral tradition, an absence of translation due to lack of funds (barely 1% of texts are translated into classical Arabic, French or English) and a certain reserve about rummaging through the memory of Africa, however honourable, gov-

© UNESCO

ernment authorities are hesitant to exhume what resembles a political golden age.

Let us judge for ourselves: treatises on good governance, texts on the harmful effects of tobacco, pharmacopeial synopses…works on law (particularly on divorce and the status of divorced women), theology, grammar and mathematics sit in dusty heaps in private libraries or at the Ahmed Baba Documentation and Research Centre in Timbuktu. Written commentaries by the sages of Cordoba, Baghdad or Djenne can still be seen there. On screen-fronted shelves, legal acts regulating the lives of Jews and apostate Christians testify to the intense commercial activity of the era. Parchments concerning selling and freeing slaves, the market prices of salt, spices, gold and feathers are propped against correspondence between sovereigns from both sides of the Sahara, illustrated with illuminations in gold.

All this is frightening. It is intimidating, to the point that even scientists are troubled by so much available knowledge. George Bohas, professor of Arabic at the Ecole normale supérieure in Lyon and an initiator of the Vecmas programme (evaluation and critical editing of sub-Saharan Arabic manuscripts) notes, "We estimate the body of existing manuscripts at 180,000, of which 25% have been inventoried, less than 10% catalogued, and 40% are still

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# ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND MANUSCRIPTS ON PALM LEAVES NEED SAVING

© UNESCO

A manuscript on palm leaf

**Between 300 and 400 years, that's the life expectancy of a palm leaf.**

Between 300 and 400 years, that's the life expectancy of a palm leaf.

Which is why, for two millennia, the kings of Southern India would periodically give orders to their scribes to recopy manuscripts their ancestors had written on these prolific but fragile leaves. The rajahs and temple authorities made sure that the oldest manuscripts were disposed of at regular intervals according to specific rituals, after they had been transcribed on fresh palm leaves.

The works included popular literature, technical and scientific manuals, treatises on traditional Ayurveda, Siddha or Yunani medicine. Today, there are still tens of thousands of these precious palm leaves in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu alone, with more to be found in Myanmar, Malaysia, Cambodia, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Thailand.

The tradition of scribes having succumbed to the onslaught of the printing press, a very large number of manuscripts began deteriorating and disintegrating as of the 19th century. Right now, only a few scholars are still able to decipher the archaic script on palm leaves. These treasures are reaching the end of their natural lives. They are attacked by humidity, fungus, white ants and cockroaches.

In 2003, UNESCO launched a preservation project, giving priority to the 100,000 palm-leaf manuscripts in repositories in southern India. A team of specialists has already published the first five volumes of a projected 25-volume Descriptive Catalogue of Palm-leaf Manuscripts..

in wooden or iron containers!" Not counting all the manuscripts stashed in the homes of families, who don't want to give them up, either out of ignorance or for sordid profiteering reasons.

### *An African panorama rises to the surface of history*

To pore over these manuscripts that have been successfully saved from insects and sand dust is a boon for the eyes as well as the spirit. The ensemble, generally inscribed on paper from the Orient (later from Italy) but also on sheepskin, bark or the scapula of a camel, is underlined, explained and annotated in the margin or on the colophon, final page of a book or at the end of a papyrus scroll where the copyist notes his name and the date he finished his work. Indirectly, we learn of an earthquake or violent brawl that perturbed the writing. Thanks to a few isolated modern translators, an entire African panorama rises again to the surface of history. The texts are decidedly not homogeneous, for good reason: though the overwhelming bulk is written in Arabic, copyists expressed themselves according to their origins – Tamashek, Hausa, Fula, but also Songhai, Dioula, Soninke or Wolof – using a common calligraphic base inspired from Maghribi, a cursive Arabic script, the form of which made it possible to use less paper.

Now, how can we imagine this fabulous historical exploration without the direct participation of local inhabitants, African scientists and national governments? This sums up the political challenge attached to the Timbuktu manuscripts, and beyond them, to the definitive rehabilitation of Africa's written history.

**Jean Michel Djian,**
french journalist
and Associate Professor,
University of Paris 8

## SANA'A MANUSCRIPTS: UNCOVERING A TREASURE OF WORDS

© Organisation Nationale de l'Archéologie, des Musées et des Manuscrits, Yemen

Example of a Sana'a manuscript.

**A journey through time, not places, is what is traced in these excerpts from the Koran dating back to the first centuries of the Hijrah (7th and 8th centuries of our era) found by chance in the Great Mosque of Sana'a (Yemen).**

What a surprise for the workers in the Great Mosque of Sana'a, rebuilding a wall that had collapsed after heavy rains in 1972, to find thousands of parchments and pieces of paper hidden in the ceiling. These manuscripts had been slumbering there for centuries. They are fragments of the Koran written in the oldest Arabic alphabet, and when they were first found no one could guess their exceptional value.

What was this collection doing inside a wall? Some say the mosque rectors were in the habit of keeping old and disintegrating Koran manuscripts in places that were both safe and worthy of the sacred text. The Grand Mosque in Sana'a, which became from the first century of the Hijrah a place of learning and dissemination of the Koran, was the designated spot. Other sources argue that the collections were stored in a safe place to protect them from looting or destruction if invaders came.

In 1984, the House of Manuscripts (Dar al Makhtutat) was founded close to the Grand Mosque, as part of a cooperation project between Yemeni and German authorities. An enormous endeavor was begun to restore the Koranic fragments. Between 1983 and 1996, approximately 15,000 out of 40,000 pages were restored, specifically 12,000 fragments on parchment and manuscripts dating back to the 7th and 8th centuries.

Some fragments were written in Hijazi, the oldest calligraphy of the Koran, used in texts long before Kufic, which is the writing most often found in the Koranic manuscripts. Hijazi is a cursive calligraphy, in which accents and points are not indicated and short vowels inexistent. It is difficult to read, requiring complete mastery of the language.

Since the launching of the Memory of the World programme, UNESCO has shown its interest in the Sana'a manuscripts by providing the House of Manuscripts with conservation materials. In 1995, the Organization also produced a CD-ROM in Arabic, English and French illustrating the history of the collection. Given recent advances in computer science, however, the CD-ROM now needs to be adapted to the latest resources.

**In the heart of Erevan, capital of Armenia, the Matenadaran houses seventeen thousand manuscripts and 30,000 documents, some dating back to antiquity. Texts on very varied subjects, written in Arabic, Persian, Syriac, Greek, Latin, Amharic, Japanese and certain Indian languages, are stored together in this museum-library, created at the same time as the Armenian alphabet in 405. Today the Matenadaran is entering the digital age thanks to UNESCO.**

# THE MATENADARAN, FROM COPYIST MONKS TO THE DIGITAL AGE

At Gayane Eliazarian's fingertips, fine scissors or a brush remove time's wrinkles from a page, bring out the carmine red of an illumination, or save a thousand-year-old text from obliteration. The workshop she runs restores an average of 20 to 30 manuscripts a year. The task is both titanic and painstaking, in certain cases requiring several years. Ms Eliazarian is proud to show off a 19th century Russian book on her desk, sent to Erevan from St Petersburg for restoration. Proof of the Matenadaran's expertise in this domain…And work on this kind of "recent" document is nothing compared to what will be needed for this 11th century Armenian book of the gospels that Ms Eliazarian pulls out of the safe, where the manuscripts soon to be "resuscitated" are kept.

© S. Mashtotz Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, Matenadaran

When such efforts are deployed to preserve ancient texts, it's best to go digital. "Whatever precautions are taken in terms of preserving manuscripts, you can never completely rule out the possibility that some will be physically destroyed by the passage of time. Digitizing is the surest means to safeguard these unique documents," asserts Chouchanik Khatchadrian, a researcher at the Matenadaran.

## *Virtual Matenadaran: free admission*

As part of the UNESCO program "Memory of the World", a team led by Archak Banutchyan developed in 2000 and 2001 the Virtual Matenadaran on the museum's website. The result: the creation of a virtual gallery, containing more than 1000 illuminations that can be contemplated at leisure on the site; more than 5000 pages of manuscripts posted on line, with descriptions and translations from Armenian into French; a data base, to consult these pages or to search the Matenadaran collection. "Our choice of documents to be digitized and put on line was guided by three criteria," explains Mr Banutchyan. "First, we chose the pages we'd already published. Then our researchers identified excerpts that were the most representative of the manuscripts' content in terms of the subjects concerned, from the religious to the profane, from history to medicine. Finally we took into account the artistic qualities of the works – the aesthetic aspect of the

© S. Mashtotz Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, Matenadaran

manuscripts, the kind of illuminations, and so on."

This project is innovative because, as Mr Banutchayan points out, "in the late 1990s, we were only beginning to be aware of the importance of internet resources and digitization in general." Now we see that the project has made it possible not only for the Matenadaran scholars to make contact with their foreign counterparts, but also to open the museum's doors to amateurs from all over the world. A large number of the Matanadaran's visitors these days first visited its website.

## *Copying by hand, digitizing: same reasoning*

Digitizing represents also a significant advance compared to microfilm techniques. "Putting manuscripts such as these on microfilm takes much longer than digital copying, which requires only one photo per page," says Gevork Ter Vartanian, the Matenadaran's chief curator. It reduces the risk of damaging the manuscripts when they are handled – and these are unique documents, many of them Armenian translations of originals that have disappeared for ever.

The same reasoning lies behind copying these manuscripts by hand, as people did 12 centuries ago, and digitizing them, Mr Banuchayan further underlines. The idea is to preserve a unique fragment of the world's memory. Like the priest from the Lori region who saw how the Communist regime was starting to persecute religion and buried a splendid 15th century New Testament, rescuing it from the threat of destruction. Removed from its underground hiding place only in the 1960s, it was brought in pitiful state to the Matedanaran, where it was restored.

**Laurence Ritter,**
Armenian journalist
and sociologist

# A LIBRARY'S DIGITAL REVIVAL

© Biblioteca Nacional Széchényi, Hungary

A Book of Hours (Horológion).

**After five centuries, most of the surviving works of the Bibliotheca Corviniana will be under the same roof again, reunited in digital form**

The Bibliotheca Corviniana was created in the 15th century by Matthias Corvinus, king of Hungary (1458-1490). During the Renaissance, it was the second greatest collection of books in Europe after the Vatican's. It fulfilled the most modern scientific standards and the needs of the humanists' idea of education, including antique Greek and Latin authors, the Bible, works by ecclesiastics, theologians, scholars, contemporary writers and even printed books. Subjects covered literature, history, philosophy, theology, rhetoric, military science, medicine, architecture and astronomy.

King Matthias searched for curios and exchanged books with the great Lorenzo Medici and other collectors. He bought codices from Italian workshops before setting up his own in his capital, Buda. More than 30 artisans illuminated and bound his manuscripts, known as Corvinas. Later, he opened his library to members of the nobility and church. He also patronized the first printing press in the Western world which produced the first book to be printed in Hungary in 1473.

After his death and during the Turkish occupation, the collection was dispersed. Today 216 Corvinas are known to exist. Only 53 volumes have remained in Hungary. Thirty nine are kept at the Austrian National Library and 49 in different Italian libraries. The others are spread out among French, German, English, Turkish and American collections.

In 2001, the Hungarian National Széchényi Library launched a joint program requesting libraries owning Corvinas to digitize them and send their scanned versions. So far, a few Corvinas have been published. More are to follow and reinstate Buda Castle. A valuable book based on the Széchényi Library's most beautiful gradual (a liturgical Codex Lat. 424 ) will be published in autumn 2007.

This corpus recreates a unique representation of the common cultural heritage of the European Renaissance. In 2005, it was inscribed on UNESCO's Memory of the World Register. The inscription has given the program a new boost, and according to Janos Kaldos of the Széchényi Library, "is a great help for negotiations with partner libraries." It also promotes the collection and makes it available to scholars and the public worldwide, upholding the link between past and future generations.

**Four centuries of colonization are recounted and illustrated in the "Colección de Lenguas Indígenas" kept in Guadalajara (Mexico). These 166 books, printed starting in 1539, also preserve the memory of 17 indigenous languages, some of which have virtually disappeared The collection was inscribed in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 2007.**

# A BRIDGE BETWEEN CULTURES

Aqui comiença el Vocabulario
EN LA LENGVA CASTELLANA Y
Mechuacane. Compuesto por el muy Reuerendo
padre Fray Maturino Gylberti dela orden del se
raphico padre Sant Francisco.
tuum Franciscum sig
Signati domini cernuum
nis redemptionis nostre.:
© University of Guadalajara

Castilian-Mechucan Glossary of Father Fray Maturino Gylberti, 1559.

Hard to believe that fragile pieces of paper, which require the wearing of gloves for handling, can constitute a solid bridge linking past to present and European culture to indigenous culture of Mexico. The "Colleccion des Lenguas Indigenas" of the Jalisco Juan José Arreola public library in Mexico comprises 166 books written for evangelical purposes during the colonial era and the 19th century. This exceptional heritage contains precious information about four centuries of religious integration and about the languages of the first inhabitants of what would become the Mexican republic.

"The collection contains a few of the first Mexican publications, some of them more astonishing than those published before the printing press (in 1500)," asserts Marina Mantilla Trolle, researcher at the University of Guadalajara. In a room as protected as a bank vault, where temperature and humidity are strictly regulated for optimal conservation of books, the historian underlines the inestimable quality of the collection, representing 17 languages belonging to nine different linguistic families, some of which have practically disappeared. For instance, the "Manual para administrar los santos sacramentos" by Bartholomé García (1760) is the only register in existence written in coahuitleca. "There is a book in the opata language of which there are only four copies in the world. You even find works in Japanese. The missionaries used every book they found in the hope that some would help them communicate with the people living in the new countries where they landed."

Among the rarest works is also the "Arte en lengua mixteca" by Fray Antonio de los Reyes (1593). Outside of Mexico, the only places the book can be found are in the Nettie Lee Benson Library at the University of Texas and in France's National Library.

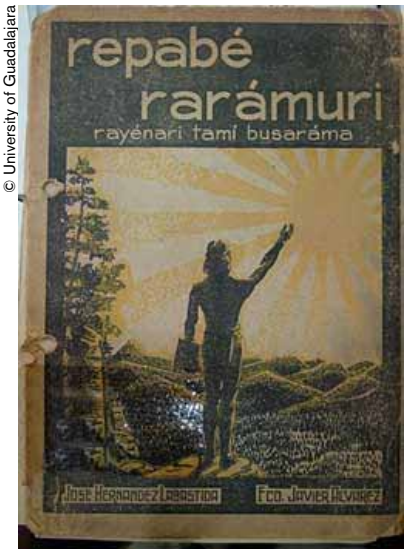
To consult the whole collection, you have to go to Guadalajara. Otherwise you would need to visit more than ten libraries in Mexico, the United States, France and England.

## *Purgatory and butterfly*

Besides the fact that the books are rare, the value of the collection lies essentially in the information they provide. According to Marina Mantilla Trolle, this information is very useful to understand the development of indigenous languages and the process of integration in Mesoamerican communities. Most of these books are bilingual dictionaries, of Castilian translated into indigenous languages, and "artes" (grammatical descriptions) as well as catechisms, confession manuals and books of sermons. Some even contain very precise phonological descriptions.

One book, entitled "Vocabulario de Molina", from 1571, is a very comprehensive dictionary which translates into "Mexican" words such as "purgatory" (nechipauloyan neye otiloyan) or "butterfly cocoon" (tecilli). Another tome from 1578 sets out in its first pages the evangelical intention: "Essential Christian doctrine in order that the ministers of these natives may teach them the principal mysteries of our holy Catholic faith and the natives understand."

In truth, the evangelical mission of the Spanish forced missionaries to learn the indigenous languages, which is why they were transcribed and studied in the books that are now

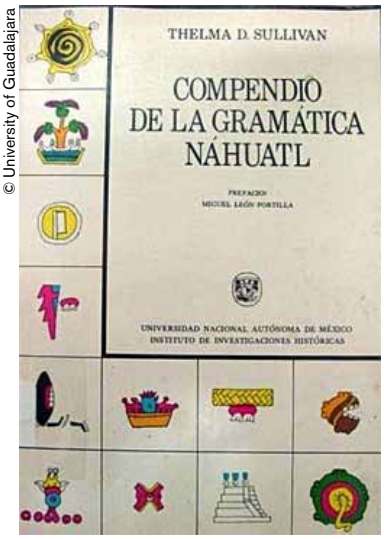


© University of Guadalajara
Tarahuamara-Spanish textbook for bilingual teaching, printed in Chihuahua in 1945.

part of the collection. These tomes were in the monastery libraries, but in the 19th century a free market law expropriated the church's possessions, making them state property, which is how they all came to be together in one library.

One special feature of these volumes is the seal the missionaries placed on certain copies to establish ownership. In somewhat the same way we now brand cattle, they heated metal until it was red-hot and pressed it to the book's edge, burning the pages to mark them with an indelible imprint.

"Each of these books constitutes a major source of knowledge. The collection is something we are only just beginning to explore," explains Marina Mantilla. A team of specialists in history, ethno-history, linguistics and philology from the Universities in Guadelajara and the Colegio de Michoacán has been formed to study these tomes. "But unfortunately sufficient funding is lacking for research on this heritage the libraries contain, as well as for its conservation and restoration," the historian adds.



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Nahuatl grammar, Mexico, 1983.

## *Living memory of vanished languages*

Yet she is optimistic, because since digitization began on part of the collection, the interest shown by scientists from different regions of the world has grown significantly. "Access to these works has been facilitated, because it's in our interest to ensure the books are known to the general public and not just academics," she concludes.

"Leafing through these books, some more than three hundred years old, is like travelling through the past. Many have handwritten annotations by monks. These texts testify to the evolution of culture and languages. They also offer a living memory of lost languages. That's how they create a bridge between eras and cultures," says Mantilla.

"We would like to safeguard this treasure, study it and promote it, but it doesn't belong to the University of Guadelajara, or to the state of Jalisco, nor to Mexico. It is part of the world's heritage, says the researcher, as she closes, with almost maternal solicitude, "El camino al cielo en lengua Mexicana", printed in 1611.

**Juan Carlos Núñez Bustillos,**
Mexican journalist

© Bibliothèque nationale de France
Digital Jikji

# JIKJI BEFORE THE BIBLE

**Believe it or not, the first book to be printed with movable metal type face was printed in Korea, almost 80 years before Gutenberg's Bible.**

n July 1377, Priests Seokcan and Daldam used movable metal type face to print the Jikji, the work of their teacher, the Korean monk Baegun Hwasang who in 1372 compiled a two-volume compendium of the essentials of "Seon." This work - whose teachings later became known as Zen Buddhism in Japan - is the oldest surviving example of a book produced with moveable metal type face. It was inscribed on the Memory of the World Register in 2001 as the "Buljo jikji simche yojeol (vol. II)."

The surviving volume, preserved in the National Library of France, contains only 38 sheets while a full version with all 307 chapters of the "Anthology of Great Buddhist Priests' Zen Teachings" is preserved in a wooden type print in the National Library of Korea.

Printed at the old Heungdeok-sa temple in Cheongju city, with funds donated by the female priest Myodeok, this religious work is almost 80 years older than Johannes Gutenberg's Bible, the first book to be printed in Europe with the help of moveable metal type face technology, a technology that remained largely unchanged over the ensuing three and a half centuries. In Europe the belated discovery of this technology paved the way to massive cultural and social upheavals, including the Reformation. It may be worth noting that there is evidence that moveable metal type face was used by Korean printers even before 1377, although their work has been lost.

The Jikji manuscript had been in the collection of Collin de Plancy, a chargé d'affaires with the French Embassy in Seoul in 1887. Sold at an auction in Paris in 1911, it was bought by Henri Vever, a collector of classics, and when he died in 1950, it was donated to the Bibliothèque nationale de France, where it has been ever since.

**Registers and log books, memoirs and travel stories, slave census reports – the archives of the Atlantic slave trade provide signposts to the itineraries taken by the old slave ships between Europe, the Americas and Africa. Where are those precious documents now?**

# SLAVE TRADE ARCHIVES: PORTS OF CALL

© National Archives of Colombia

Agreement prohibiting the trade of black slaves. Source: Real Audiencia - Cundinamarca, volume 16. 1557, June 18, Santa Fé (Bogotà).

A domain reserved for historians since the end of the 19th century, the Atlantic slave trade archives have acquired a new legitimacy in the last few decades as the memory of the event, raised to the rank of cultural asset.

The European countries that practiced the trade in African slaves between the 16th and 19th century for the profit of their overseas colonies are, a priori, those that hold the largest repositories. The official correspondence of local colonial authorities, for instance, is today kept in the Public Records Office in Kew, United Kingdom (Colonial Office), the Archives d'Outre-Mer françaises in Aix-en-Provence, France ("fonds des colonies"), the Archivo General de Las Indias in Seville, Spain ("Capitania general de Cuba"), the Rigsarkivet in Copenhagen, Denmark, and the Arquivo Historico Ultramarino in Lisbon, Portugal.

In Africa, the victim of the trade, archives remain in those countries where in the era of the fight against illegal trade, a central administration was established – this is the case in the first states founded by freed slaves, like Sierra Leone and Liberia, whose collections have suffered from recent civil wars. In Portuguese-speaking countries (Cap Verde, Sao Tome e Principe and Angola), certain records of the former colonial government go back as far as the 17th century (Arquivo dal Camara municipal de Principe, since 1665).

In America, national archives preserve collections that are often intact : in Argentina (the « Division Colonial-seccion Gobierno » starting in the late 16th century), in Colombia (The collection « Negros y Esclavos » from 1553), in Brazil (Fundo Marinha-Secretaria de Estado, 1786-1895), and in Cuba (the private Valle-Iznaga archive going back to 1606).

## *Companies, ports and private collections*

In addition, emblematic collections are to be found in the possession of the important companies granted the monopoly of the slave trade: the Dutch West-Indische Compagnie in The Hague (1675-1791), the British Royal African Company (1672-1731) in the Public Records Office in Kew, the West Indies and Guinea Company (1671-1754) in Copenhagen, and the Compagnie des Indes françaises in Lorient.

Similarly, archives remain in the great European slave-trading ports (Liverpool, Bristol, London, La Rochelle, Bordeaux, Nantes, Le Havre, Middelburg, Amsterdam). Chambers of commerce, port authorities, former maritime courts (admiralties) have left extensive records of the seafaring slave trade throughout the 18th century, notably the archives on traders' bankruptcies in Antwerp and Bordeaux.

Finally, there are private collections like those of the Belgian slave-trading captain Van Alstein in Gent, or the slave trader Humphrey Morice, director of the Bank of England from 1721 to 1736, in London.

The abolition of the slave trade inspired important research on slavery at the beginning of the 19th century in England, in the context of a parliamentary debate before the law was voted in 1807 (Parliamentary Papers). The same occurred in France during the period of the July Monarchy until the 1848 abolition.

## *What do these archives contain?*

The documents preserved in these collections perpetuate the memory of the slave trade and slavery. We discover notably the extensive series of registers concerning shipping that can be used to produce quantitative data on slave trading and sometimes specific details on particular voyages.

The ships' seafaring documents also yield valuable information: regulations and shipping contracts that talk about discipline on board, captains' reports that often give descriptions of the places where trad-

© Archives Claude-Joseph Vernet

The port of Bordeaux-
Claude-Joseph Vernet 1759.

ing was conducted, and log-book accounts of uprisings that broke out at sea.

Memoirs and travel stories recount the history of slavery from another angle. Numerous in the 18th century, they depict the different slave routes, sometimes including drawings mapping the African coast and often relate the customs of the people who were the slave-traders' prey.

Other private collections come from agricultural properties in America, containing bills of sale for slaves, promissory notes or accounting ledgers, all of them sources that make it possible to piece together the daily lives of slaves who worked on the plantations.

Regarding census reports of slaves before and after abolition, we find in the Latin American colonies, for instance, records of sales and mortgages of slaves in Brazil, and applications for emancipation in Argentina. In Africa too, there are lists of the names of slaves freed by the British navy, beginning in 1815, who were resettled in Sierra Leone ("Liberated African Registers").

Some archives recently brought to light, such as the Chinguetti Arabic manuscripts about Africa in Timbuktu (insert link to article) and those of the "zaouias", religious orders of the Algerian and Moroccan Sahara, may reveal new aspects of African slavery.

These repositories are scattered all over the world, an indication of the magnitude of the task to be accomplished in taking inventory of and preserving the archives of the slave trade. The publication in 2007 by the Archives de France of a general guide to the sources on the slave trade and slavery can set an example for Europe. In West Africa where some countries are emerging from civil war, safeguarding major collections such as the one in Sierra Leone is a goal that must be taken on by the international community.

**Louis Bergès,**
General Curator of National Heritage,
Ministry of Culture, France

© UNESCO/Georges Malempré

Detail of the monument "Porte du Non Retour."
Sculpture by Beninese artist Domenica Kouass.

# TWENTY SEVEN KILOMETRES OF DOCUMENTS

**Eleven countries with histories shaped by the international slave trade are exploring, preserving and sharing their archives, a project supported by UNESCO**

Between March 1806 and February 1807, more than 30 ships with United States flags and crews entered Havana Bay, freighted by local traders, transporting over 5,000 captive Africans in their holds to be sold as slaves. These stark statistics are part of a rich trove of primary source information vividly depicting Cuba's role in the international slave trade, recently uncovered by local archivists. They combed through 27 linear kilometres of documents kept in national archives, locating 38 particularly relevant collections from the colonial period.

Highlights from 11 of these collections are now available on a CD-Rom, containing 500 documents, produced by the Slave Trade Archives Project, funded by NORAD and launched by UNESCO in 1999. Gambia, meanwhile, has developed a historical text based on its national records, and Senegal a virtual guided tour of Gorée Island, key slave trading post with its infamous House of Slaves. The project was designed to safeguard and improve access to original documentary sources on the transatlantic slave trade, notably through digitization.

As the project unfolded, national archives in participating African, Latin American and Caribbean countries worked on upgrading their facilities, obtaining copies of records held elsewhere and training staff. An array of historical papers – from official correspondence and shipping records to slaves' bills of sale and personal memoirs - were scanned and selected.

Eleven countries took part - Benin, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana and Senegal in Africa, plus Argentina, Brazil, Barbados, Colombia, Cuba and Haiti - from 2000 to 2004. Among the project's tangible results, seminars were held, websites created, a dozen databases loaded with over 10,000 documents, some 200,000 items, images and documents, digitized and 14 institutions acquired computer equipment. Future plans will incorporate more countries in this ongoing effort to resurrect a neglected facet of our collective memory...

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Los Olvidados

**Some famous classics of world cinema are among those inscribed in the Memory of the World Register. Others, although lesser-known, deserve their place in the Register, witnesses to exceptional human achievements..**

**Lumière Films (France)**

The word "cinema" originated from "cinématographe", a device invented in 1895 by the Lumière brothers, Auguste and Louis. They gave the world its first ever motion picture, with the projection of "La Sortie des usines Lumière" ("Leaving the Lumière Factory").

Their archive of 1,405 titles, produced by cinema pioneers between 1896 and 1900, contains a wealth of documentary material - scenes of daily life, historical events, drama and comedy. The collection is kept by the French Film Archives.

**Metropolis (Germany)**

Director Fritz Lang's silent futuristic film is today considered a masterpiece of German expressionism. Long before the term "super-production" was associated with cinema, this film employed 35,000 extras, used up 620,000 metres of film and took close to a year to shoot. Because it was a commercial failure when first shown in 1927, it had to be heavily cut. It has since been restored to a version close to the original, with the soundtrack recorded at that time by the Saarbrücken Symphony Orchestra.

**Los Olvidados (Mexico)**

Lost for 20 years, the original negative of this 1950 film is now preserved in the film archives of the National Autonomous University in Mexico City. Because it portrayed children in an urban slum, it was highly controversial during filming and even after its release, better known in English as "The Young and The Damned". The following year, it caused a sensation at the Cannes Film Festival, winning an award for Spanish-Mexican director Luis Buñuel. Until he died in 1983, Buñuel went on to make many more films in Mexico and Europe and is today one of world's major film directors.

**Roald Amundsen's South Pole Expedition (Norway)**

The explorer Amundsen and his four-man team were the first people to reach the South Pole on 14 December 1911, a daring feat which successfully ended thanks to exceptionally good logistic planning and execution. The preparations for this expedition, the dog-sled journey and their return are documented in film footage from 1910 to 1912.

Though the material is incomplete, it is made up of original sequences, consisting of negative film and first and second-generation print material, kept by the Norwegian Film Institute and the National Library.

**The Battle of the Somme (United Kingdom)**

This 1916 film on one of the major battles of the First World War is the first feature-length documentary ever to record war in action. It marked the development of documentary and propaganda war films and brought about debate on issues concerning the ethical treatment of "factual" film which continue to be relevant today. The film's oldest existing copy is a cornerstone of the cinematic collection of the British Imperial War Museum.

© UNESCO

Human Rights Archive of Chile.

**All inscriptions in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register are unique; the content of some documents, however, is quite unexpected. Some examples.**

### Human Rights Archive (Chile)

Chile's military dictatorship, which lasted from 1973 to 1989, is documented in various archives of national institutions and human rights organizations. These include a photo register of some 1,000 people who disappeared, cassettes and videos of their stories, digitalized documents of the 3,877 human rights abuses investigated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, press clippings and many more. Confronting the painful memories of this turbulent past has been important in the country's healing process. More.

### Golden Lists of the Qing Dynasty Imperial Examination (China)

These sheets of yellow paper, written in Chinese and Manchu, are lists of candidates who passed the palace civil service examination, prepared for the Emperor who himself supervised the final selection stage. Such documents from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) are prized for their artistic calligraphy. This recruitment system influenced those in Japan, Korea and Vietnam, and even those in some European countries.

### The Leprosy Archives of Bergen (Norway)

It may come as a surprise that 19th century Bergen was a scientific centre in the fight against leprosy, a disease that has almost been wiped out in Europe today. Also known as Hansen's disease, after the Norwegian doctor who discovered the leprosy bacillus, it was not such an unusual ailment in Europe for many centuries, especially in coastal regions. The Leprosy Archives document the scientific breakthrough against the disease that today still affects 220,000 people the world over.

### Earliest Islamic (Kufic) Inscription (Saudi Arabia)

A red sandstone block of rock in the desert bears the oldest Islamic inscription ever found. It is located on the ancient trade and pilgrimage route connecting the early Islamic city of al-Mabiyat with Madain Saleh. The inscription mentions the date of the death of the second Caliph of Islam, Omar bin al-Khattab, which occurred on the last night of the month of Dul-Hajj in the year 23 Hegrah (corresponding to 644 AD).

### The Bleek Collection (South Africa)

In the 19th century, W.H.I. Bleek and two family members developed a phonetic script for transcribing the characteristic clicks and sounds of the language of the |Xam, a now-extinct hunter-gatherer society of the San Bushmen. Today, their photographs and notebooks comprising 12,000 pages provide the only existing glimpse into the life and culture of this late Stone Age people.

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